Accordingly, the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Amendment Bill 2000 has been introduced in the Rajya Sabha in April, 2000 with the following objectives:

(i) To allow Indian companies *i.e.* companies registered in India, to mine coal and lignite without the existing restriction of captive consumption; and

(ii) to engage in exploration of coal and lignite resources in the country.

The Bill has been recommended by the Standing Committee on Energy for adoption. However, some trade unions have raised some objections which are under consideration by a Group of Ministers constituted to look into the problems of the coal industry. The recommendation of the GOM is awaited.

Postal service in every Panchayat

†2233. SHRI KRIPAL PARMAR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any plan for providing postal service in every Panchayat of country under which branch post-office, sub post-office or post-office would be set up;

(b) if so, by when it would be done, and if not, the reasons therefor, and

(c) the numbers of such Gram Panchayats at present, specially in Himachal Pradesh, which still do not have postal service facilities and by when these facilities would be provided in these Panchayats?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) and (b) Post offices are provided in those GP villages, which fulfil distance, population and income norms fixed for this purpose, subject to the availability of resources. Details of the norms are given in the Statement (See below). No time frame can be fixed in this regard since post offices can be provided only if norms are complied with.

(c) There are 608 out of 3037 GP villages, which currently do not have post office facilities. However all villages are being provided basic postal facilities like daily delivery of dak, collection of mail through letter boxes and sale of stamps and stationery at the doorstep. Post office

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

facilities can be provided in the 608 villages only subejct to compliance of norms and availability of resources.

Statement

Norms for Opening post offices

1. Norms for opening Extra Departmental Branch Post Offices:

1.1 Population:

(a) In Normal Areas:

3000 population in a group of villages (including the PPO village)

(b) In Hilly, Tribal, Desert and inacessible areas:

500 population in an individual village or 1000 population in a group of villages.

1.2 Distance

(a) In Normal Areas:

The minimum distance from the nearest exting post office will be 3 kms.

(b) In Hilly, Tribal, Desert and Inaccessible Areas:

The distance limit will be the same as above except that in Hilly Areas, the minimum distance limit can be relaxed by the Directorate in cases where such relaxation is warranted by special circumstances which should be clearly explained while submitting a proposal.

1.3 Anticipated income:

(a) In Normal Areas:

The minimum anticipated reveune will be 33— % of the cost

(b) In Hilly, Tribal, Desert and Inaccessible Areas:

The minimum anticipated income will be 15% of the cost.

It is further to be ensured that as a result of the opening of a new post office, the loss in respect of the parent post office does not increase beyond the permissible limit nor is its income reduced below the minimum prescribed.

2. Criteria for upgrading/opening Department Sub Post Office:

(a) In Rural Areas:

The minimum work load of the Extra Departmental Branch Post Office, proposed to be upgraded should be five hours per day. The

permissible limit of annual loss is Rs. 2400/- in Normal rural Areas and Rs. 4800/- in Tribal and Hilly Areas.

It is further to be ensured that as a result of the opening of a new post office, the loss in respect of the parent post office does not increases beyond the permissible limit nor is its income reduced below the minimum prescribed.

(b) In Urban Areas:

In Urban areas, the post office should initially be self-supporting and at the time of the first annua! review, it should show a 5% profit to be eligible for further retention.

The minimum distance between two post offices should be 1.5 kms. in cities with a population of 20 lakhs and above and 2kms. in other urban areas. No two delivery offices, however, should be closer than 5 kms. for each other.

Heads of Circles have powers to relax the distance condition in 10% of the cases.

A Delivery Post Office in Urban Area should have a minimum of 7 Postmen's beats.

Modernisation of communication facilities in Maharashtra

2234. SHRI SANJAY NIRUPAM: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to expand capacity of the existing telephone exchanges by providing modern communication facility in Maharashtra during the year 2003-2004:

(b) if so, the details thereof, district-wise; and

(c) the funds provided by Government for the said period?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) Yes, Sir.